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New York

THEATRE CRITICS'

Reviews

1943

INDEX

Stage Play	Pages
*All for All	271, 272, 273
*Another Love Story	260, 261, 262
Apology	351, 352, 353
Ask My Friend Sandy	378, 379, 380
Barber Had Two Sons (The)	383, 384, 385
Blossom Time	286, 287, 288
Boy Meets Girl	316, 317
Bright Lights of 1944	276, 277, 278
Chauve Souris 1943	298, 299, 300
Counterattack	380, 381, 382
Dark Eyes	390, 391, 392
*Early to Bed	314, 315, 316
Family (The)	344, 345, 346
First Million (The)	330, 331, 332
For Your Pleasure	374, 375, 376
Hairpin Harmony	269, 270
*Harriet	364, 365, 366
*Kiss and Tell	356, 357, 358
Land of Fame	274, 275, 276
*Laugh Time	284, 285, 286
†*Manhattan Nocturne	246, 247, 248
Men in Shadow	360, 361, 362
*Merry Widow (The)	301, 302, 303
Milky Way (The)	317
Moon Vine (The)	372, 373, 374

Stage Play	Pages
Murder Without Crime	293, 294, 295
My Dear Public	281, 282, 283
*Naked Genius (The)	253, 254, 255
*New Life (A)	279, 280, 281
Nine Girls	393, 394, 395
*Oklahoma	341, 342, 343
*One Touch of Venus	264, 265, 266
*Othello	256, 257, 258
Patriots (The)	385, 386, 387, 388
Richard III	348, 349, 350
Run Little Chillun	296, 297, 298
†*Slightly Married	248, 249, 250
Snark Was a Boojum (The)	288, 289, 290
*Something for the Boys	398, 399, 400
Sons and Soldiers	325, 326, 327
Student Prince (The)	320, 321, 322
This Rock	369, 370, 371
Those Endearing Young Charms	318, 319, 320
*Three's a Family	228, 329, 330
*Tomorrow the World	334, 335, 336
Try and Get It	306, 307, 308
*Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304, 305, 306
Vagabond King (The)	311, 312, 313
†*Victory Belles	244, 245, 246
*Ziegfeld Follies	338, 339, 340

PRODUCTIONS CONTINUING

Reviews appeared in the 1942 CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

Stage Play	Pages
*Doughgirls (The)	124, 125, 126
*Janie	244, 245, 246
*Rosalinda	187, 188, 189
*Star and Garter	262, 263, 264

Reviews appeared in the 1941 CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

*Angel Street	182, 183, 184, 185
*Arsenic and Old Lace	417, 418, 419, 420
*Life With Father	489, 490, 491
*Tobacco Road	498, 499, 500

*Asterisks indicate show scheduled to play week of November 1, 1943.

†"*Slightly Married*" opened Monday, October 25th, at the Cort Theatre.
†"*Manhattan Nocturne*" opened Tuesday, October 26th, at the Forrest Theatre.
†"*Victory Belles*" opened Tuesday, October 26th, at the Mansfield Theatre.

THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Theater Critics' Reviews brings you the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Victory Belles"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 27, 1943

Victory Belles Hits New Drama Low

By BURTON RASCOE

I MAY BE green at this business, but I believe a record was established last night. It is my conviction (and I am not the least bit humble about it) that the absolute, irreducible zero in the way of entertainment, not only for Broadway but for something for the natives of Paphiagonia, was reached by Alice Gerstenberg, the author, and Henry Adrian, the producer, of Victory Belles at the Mansfield.

It is all a blur, and I defy the author to explain what the play is about, but close toward the curtain of the second act the butler (the prettiest man in the cast, who had kept on telling the army sergeant not to address him as "sir" but as "Gleejan," since he was only a servant and not the master of the house or an honored guest) suddenly socked a brigadier general with a blackjack, exclaiming, "This is the FBI. . . . All of you stand atyouplushploshl Notta single blubatch. You are all under arrest! This man askatchauan terplitz curfew ballbitz vermootchlee!" (The poor actor went haywire.)

Mr. Rowland Field, a heavy-set gentleman who is drama critic for the Newark Evening News and associated papers and a linguist who perceived the niceties of this articulation, fell into the aisles with an excess of mirth and had to be assisted to his feet by four usherettes. Mr. Otis Guernsey, Jr., of the Herald Tribune, at this point, was seen streaking up the aisle in pursuit of the enchantingly beautiful young woman who has pledged her troth to him, yelling, "I swear my job isn't always this bad!" Ray Barrett of the News was being truculent to the lovely who had accompanied him, saying, "This is one of the hazards of earning a living and I've got to make the best of it or quit my job." Mrs. Charles Honce, the gorgeous wife of the feature editor of the Associated Press, only a moment later was dashing for a cab, hurling back at her abashed husband, "So you take your business associates to Oklahoma! and Othello! And you take me to something like this!"

There are 17 members of the cast of Victory Belles. Although most of them acted as though they never had been on the stage before, I am asking the paper to omit the usual cast box, not only because there is a paper shortage but because there are a few talented members of the cast who may like to forget they were ever in it. . . . And I grovel in the dust before the charm of that most beauteous of all the Bennett clan, Miss Barbara, and wish her much better success than this. What a chore they gave you, Miss Barbara!

NEW YORK TIMES
October 27, 1943

Premiere of 'Victory Belles'

THE Broadway theatre has afforded some embarrassing evenings this season, as everyone knows, but one would have had to be at the Mansfield last evening to understand what that word "embarrassing" really means. Ordinarily with such a storm as was raging outdoors most mortals would have been content to remain under a tight roof, but after the first act of "Victory Belles" many a hardy soul retrieved his rubbers and fled into the night. After the second act the exodus was almost a Dunkerque.

What happened at the Mansfield, to put it briefly and bluntly, was this: a group of actors and actresses, but one or two of whom could be understood, screamed their way through as dull and dreary and ineptly written a script as has been foisted upon the public in many a sad moon. The plot? You wouldn't believe it if we could unravel it. It had something to do with women in wartime and their difficulties in finding husbands.

Usually in a case like this you can single someone out to mention, saying politely that he or she deserved a better script. In this case it is better to forget the whole thing.

K. S.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 27, 1943

"Victory Belles"

By MARK SCHUBART

WITH THE opening of *Victory Belles*, the theater season, which has already achieved some rare curios, has sunk to new depths of dismal entertainment. For the only distinction Miss Gerstenberg's farce-comedy can claim is that it is, in its way, a perfect thing. Its dullness is unbroken by a single laugh; its heavy-handedness is unalleviated by a single amusing line; its ineptness remains triumphantly untainted by a single comfortable entrance or exit; and its roster of characters consistently eschews anything remotely resembling a human being.

The plot of the piece, which is for the most part unintelligible, has something to do with a week-end party for service men run by a group of women and girls who are worried about the husband shortage. During Act I you are told no less than six times that there are only four and one-half men to every seven women in the country. Eventually the men folk arrive and there ensues, in Act II, a series of seductions, running-after, walkings-in-the-garden, displayings of leg and makings with the eye which only succeed in ensnaring the wrong men in the arms of the wrong women. Then, just when you think you've figured out who's in love with whom, the butler, who has been secretively trying to put through a call to Washington only to be told that the circuits are not available, ups and hops a stray colonel on the head and announces that he's from the FBI and will they please cart the colonel, who is really a spy, into the bedroom. How this dreadful thing ends, I couldn't say. Two acts were enough.

In the cast, Miss Bennett looks attractive, which is more than can be said for the set.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 27, 1943

'Victory Belles' Only Embarrasses Audience, Actors

By RAY BARRETT

A GROUP of actors spent two of the most embarrassing hours of their lives last night. They were forced to speak childish lines and go through ridiculous stage business in full view of a house full of people (before the third act) at the Mansfield Theatre.

This little opus, labeled a farce comedy, is called "Victory Belles." Henry Adrian, the man responsible for producing this thing, was also the director. The program charges Alice Gerstenberg with being the author.

The plot, just for the records, forces two young girls, one aging maiden, one aging triple-divorcee, plus one middle-aged, fat widow, to act like a pack of alley cats in search of mates. Out of this evolves, believe it or not, a counter plot about spies.

When the suave butler suddenly drops his condescending manner, straightens himself out to full height and seriously intones, "I'm an FBI man," the audience chokes with laughter. Thereafter, the audience joined in the fun and hissed the villain.

It would be best to shield the actors. But, after all, their names are right at the top of this story for all to see. Several capable people are in the cast. Ellen Merrill is very pretty and shows acting promise. Phil Denman made the most of a juvenile role, actually getting laughs where they were intended.

Barbara Bennett was making her return to Broadway in this. She and Mabel Taliaferro and Marie Gale were featured.

A single setting by Edward de Forrest was on the stage.

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Critics'
THEATRE REVIEWS

"Victory Belles"

NEW YORK SUN
October 27, 1943

'Victory Belles'

By HERRICK BROWN

ON THE wings of last night's gale a silly and inept little trifle called "Victory Belles," came swirling onto the stage of the Mansfield Theater, where it promptly fell flat on its face. Alice Gerstenberg, who wrote it and labeled it farce, is described in the program as Chicago's No. 1 playwright. "Victory Belles" will hardly win her the same standing in Manhattan.

It is Miss Gerstenberg's notion obviously that if a group of women, all but one eligible for matrimony, are gathered together for the week-end in a charming suburban home in Tarrytown and set to stalking some possible husbands before the shortage of available man power becomes too acute, the result is bound to be pretty hilarious. After seeing her concoction of feeble gags, stock characters, and dull situations, we are definitely among the dissenters. In fact, if the good town fathers of Tarrytown ever find out what she imagines goes on there, Miss Gerstenberg better hustle right back to Chicago.

The hostess for the occasion is a nit-wit of a mother who fears her daughter, 24, will never find a mate with all the boys rushing off to war. Among the others tangled up in the proceedings are a maiden aunt, a young lady just back from her third trip to Reno, a handsome butler, the inevitable dumb but beautiful girl from Dixie, her very stout mother, a whiskey guzzling sergeant who won a lottery and thus landed in Tarrytown, and several other men in uniform.

Oh, yes, this being an up-to-date play, there is a spy angle, too, to add a dash of mystery. The major mystery, however, is how Henry Adrian, the producer, ever persuaded Mabel Taliaferro to play the scatter-brained mother and Barbara Bennett, the prodigal from Nevada's divorce courts, in anything so closely akin to charades. They do lend a professional touch to the evening here and there. Most of the rest of the acting is as amateurish and as unamusing as the play itself. Even with Broadway saying that anything runs these days, "Victorious Belles" is a dreadful and hopeless entry.

'VICTORY BELLES'

A farce-comedy by Alice Gerstenberg; staged by Henry Adrian; setting by Edward de Forrest; produced by Mr. Adrian at the Mansfield Theater, Tuesday, October 26, 1943. The cast:

Miss Ann Stewart	Ellen Merrill
Miss Kathlene Stirling	Sally Gracie
Miss Mary Breton	Marie Gale
Mrs. Grace Stewart	Mabel Taliaferro
Geejan	Addison Randall
Mrs. Mildred Stirling	Jessie Miller
Miss Flo Hilliard	Barbara Bennett
Lieut. James Richardson	Ralph Clanton
Private Eric Stanley	Stanley Phillips
Sergt. Joe Collier	Walter Appler
Col. Edward Horton	Raymond Van Sickle
Donald Bacchus	Philip Denman
Thomas Richardson	Robert Ober
June Winkle	Margaret Eckman
Mr. Popa	Burton Mallory
Two policeman	William Paul, Oscar Miller

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 27, 1943

'Victory Belles'

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY, JR.

NOSTALGIA was the order of the evening last night at the Mansfield, as "Victory Belles," the season's most pathetic production, opened to a slightly embarassed audience. Not one of the witnesses could have failed to be reminded of high school days by the amateurishness which was the most prominent characteristic. Though the Mansfield usually houses plays, good or bad, "Victory Belles" could hardly be classed as a play at all. Its "plot" gets its impulse from an article in a national magazine stating that after the war there will be only four and one-half available husbands for every seven wives. This article has inspired Alice Gerstenberg to write three acts of words spoken mostly by impossible women who are immediately induced to grab off the first available male. Though this theatrical presentation is billed as a farce comedy, the meaningless situations and fatuous dialogue leaves the audience laughing at the play rather than with it.

The cast itself seems to care less for the lines than the audience—in fact, the play is a rarity in that it does not boast a single good performance. This is about half the fault of the players, some of whom act as though they had never before been on stage, and half the fault of the playwright, who has given them nothing to work with. Mabel Taliaferro, Barbara Bennett, Ellen Merrill, Robert Ober, Ralph Clanton and others run about as though they were trying to get it over with as quickly as possible, and indeed a mercy killing after one performance would be the kindest fate for "Victory Belles."

Even the best of playwrights turn up with a turkey now and then, and it is perfectly excusable for Miss Gerstenberg to have written a bad play—the wonder is that it ever crossed a producer's desk. Henry Adrian was the sponsor of last night's fiasco and he has certainly been in error as to the nature of the professional theater. He has offered it on Broadway—B-R-O-A-D-W-A-Y—which is supposed to be the greatest, finest, most finished theatrical center in the world. The principal of P. S. 00 would blush to present it to the ninth grade.

NEW YORK POST
October 27, 1943

"Victory Belles" a Wartime Mishap at the Mansfield

By WILELLA WALDORF

FOR SOME reason that nobody so far has been able to explain, two new plays decided to open on Broadway last night. It is customary in such conflict for one of the productions to shift its premiere to some other free night during the week, but since neither of the newcomers could be budged from its original position, we dug up a mackintosh, galoshes and an old felt hat and plunged through the tempest to the Mansfield Theatre to see "Victory Belles," a farce comedy by Alice Gerstenberg guaranteed, according to the advance advertising, to provoke "peals of laughter."

"Victory Belles" announced its opening date some time before "Manhattan Nocturne." Roy Walling's drama in which Eddie Dowling appeared last night at the Forrest, and therefore —at least in this department—gets a priority rating. "Manhattan Nocturne" will be reviewed tomorrow.

There's A War On

This is an unusual season. As someone has so truly said, there's a war on. All sorts of inept plays are doing big business on Broadway.

It is, however, our carefully considered opinion that "Victory Belles" will be unable to find a public even now, in the midst of the war boom. This is a rash statement in view of what goes on in the theatres these evenings, but then "Victory Belles" is an unusually putrid play, insipidly staged, indifferently acted.

We look back with a sort of rueful pride to the fact that "Hairpin Harmony," the worst musical comedy (so far) of the new season, was unable to carry on more than a few performances. "Victory Belles" may be described as a sort of "Hairpin Harmony" without music. There is even a scene in which a young woman with a southern accent as thick as New Orleans molasses has her evening gown torn off, and stands around in her lingerie shrieking that her honor has been besmirched.

Although it tries to be cutely giddy on the subject of the coming husband shortage, Miss Gerstenberg's farce succeeds chiefly in being incredibly dull. For the first ten minutes the dialogue made so little sense that we began to wonder if perhaps the actors were speaking a foreign language. But no. It was English, or at any rate what passes for English at the Mansfield.

Husband Hunt

The scene is Tarrytown, N. Y., where Mrs. Stewart, a wealthy imbecile, is perturbed on reading in a national magazine that after the war there will be only four and a half men for every seven women in the U. S. A. Therefore, she feels that her daughter Ann must snare a husband before the boys from the nearby Army post move overseas. To this end, she gives week-end parties attended by uniformed guests.

Since neither Ann nor her friends and relatives seem to be having any luck in the marriage market, however, Flo Hilliard, a family friend just back from her third Reno divorce, undertakes to teach them all the proper luring methods, and proceeds to organize a corps of Victory Belles.

The role of Flo is played by Barbara Bennett, daughter of Richard, sister of Constance and Joan, who is returning to a stage she left at a tender age. Miss Bennett is a lacquer-locked brunette, very svelte, and manages now and then to get off some insufferable lines as if they were the latest bon mots.

How Mabel Taliaferro happens to find herself twittering around as the idiotic Mrs. Stewart we shall probably never know, and the third featured player of the production, Marie Gale, is actually making her Broadway debut in this piece. Miss Gale comes from the noted Bainbridge stock company that used to thrive in Minneapolis. She has an agreeable personality. Ralph Clanton and Stanley Phillips, two of the gentlemen in uniform, deserve better stuff than this. Why is it that, even with a war on, the young men in so many plays are better than the girls?

Foiled by the Phone Co.

Miss Bennett's current husband, Addison Randall, plays the butler in "Victory Belles." He wore a gun and kept trying to put in a long distance call to Washington, only to be foiled by the telephone company. Just before we left he knocked out a colonel whom he denounced as a spy, and revealed himself as an agent of the F.B.I.

It is quite possible that later in the evening he turned out to be not a G-Man after all, but Gyp the Blood or Lefty Louie. We did not wait to find out.

"Victory Belles"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 28, 1943

'Victory Belles' New Show at Mansfield

By ROBERT GARLAND

PRODUCER Henry Adrian sure must be an optimist. Optimism is the one conceivable excuse for exposing "Victory Belles" for a second consecutive performance upon the stage of the Mansfield Theatre.

Except for a coltly looking background by Edward de Forrest, some showy gowns by Wilma and a hair-do or two by Charles of the Ritz, I can discover no earthly reason for having exposed the alleged farce-comedy in the first place. It has to be seen to be depreciated.

What is more, "Victory Belles"—someone must have worked all night thinking up that title—starts out by being one thing and then turns out to be something entirely different. First it is a would-be funny piece about a batch of lovelorn ladies. Then, all of a sudden, it is a spy play with the dear old missing jewel thrown in for good measure. One, I regret to say, is as lack-luster as the other. On second thought, maybe I'm mistaken and the lovelorn ladies are the more unappealing.

Ladies in Chase

For the first half of this three-act new arrival, these lovelorn ladies, all dressed up and with no place to go, chase their bewildered boy-friends—a couple or three soldiers and a guy who, according to his own admission couldn't exactly make it—up and down and back and forth, across Mr. de Forrest's commodious drawing-room. On stage or off, I have seldom seen the female of the species behave so alley-catishly. Times are tough, I know. But goodness gracious, ladies!

Then there's a gentlemanly butler who turns out to be an FBI man. Or is it vice versa? And a sergeant who turns out to be something other than a sergeant. And a man who delivers groceries and must have something to do with the mixed-up story. And a lady who rattles her keys and sings "Jingle, Jangle, Jingle," until sometimes, just for fun she changes it to "Jingle, Jangle, Jungle." And much talk of sex and the coming scarcity of men.

Even on a second night, this sort of thing is embarrassing to both the members of the cast and the members of the continuously diminishing congregation. Alice Gerstenberg, who wrote this "Victory Belle," is known as "Chicago's Number 1 Playwright." So says the program! Well, if she is, she certainly should know better than to have tried to make something funny out of the possibility of there being a great many young men killed off before this war is over. "The Husband Shortage," as Amram Scheinfeld calls it.

There is a good hard-working cast headed by Mabel Taliaferro—she, if your memory goes back that far, of "Polly of the Circus." And Barbara Bennett, who comes midway between Constance and Joan. And Robert Ober, who once played "Madame X" with Sarah Bernhardt. And Raymond Van Sickle, who is something of a playwright. But all their hard work comes to nothing in the exhibit at the Mansfield . . . If I were Optimist-Producer Henry Adrian, I'd let the matter drop, pretending it never really happened.

"Manhattan Nocturne"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 27, 1943

'Manhattan Nocturne' Absorbing Drama About a Girl Gone Wrong

By JOHN CHAPMAN

A GOOD first night is exciting to see, giving the beholder the satisfying, proprietary sense of having been in on things from the beginning. Those who last night fought through the storm to the Forrest Theatre to see "Manhattan Nocturne" were rewarded by witnessing an absorbing, simple drama and two performances which set a number of the customers cheering at curtain-fall.

One of the performances was Eddie Dowling's—but you can expect that. Eddie has done splendid jobs many times before now and once again his calm authority pervades the stage. What one couldn't expect—because she was an unknown making her Broadway debut — was the playing of a young lady named Terry Holmes, who took a role that in other hands could have been all wrong and made it exactly right.

It is a difficult role—that of a prostitute whose memory goes back less than a year; back only to the time she became a call girl in a cheap hotel, and she can't even remember exactly how that came about. Can't, that is, until a final scene in a magistrate's chambers when she pushes through the fog of amnesia and remembers all her story. Her story is an answer to the question that has been asked in many a cheap hotel room: "How did you get into . . . uh . . . this?"

Hard to Play Right

It is a difficult roll, because any overplaying of several scenes of mental tension would be all wrong—and so would any deliberate underplaying of the same. Miss Holmes manages to make the girl understandably human and an object of tender regard. It's a fine, heartening job and she is hereby congratulated and welcomed. She learned some of what she knows at the Sayville, L. I., Playhouse; the rest undoubtedly came from directress Stella Adler and co-star Eddie Dowling.

In "Manhattan Nocturne" Dowling, a writer on the skids, goes to a call hotel and engages a girl to visit him just long enough to be the co-respondent unknown in a framed-up divorce case. The writer's wife is getting rid of him for a richer man, and he's carrying the torch.

No Bad Performances

In comes the girl—hard, on the defensive, but bright. When the "raid" by wife, lawyer and witness is over with she stays to talk. She learns the writer's troubles and he senses hers, but is baffled by the wall of amnesia. Each finds help in the other. In outline this may sound corny, but as Roy Walling has written it it is, as I say, absorbing. The author does not, for instance, cheapen his drama by having man and girl fall in love.

There are no bad performances in the play either in the writing or the acting. Even Tom McElhany, with only a minute to work in, scores in a bit as a waiter. Wendell Corey makes a believably evil pimp, John Farrell plays a commendably normal detective, and Howard Smith, as a magistrate, is so right that he took me back twenty years to when I was covering West Side Court.

Advance reports on "Manhattan Nocturne" were that it wasn't any good. That made last night all the more satisfying. Mr. Walling has written his play intelligently and with economy, and Miss Adler has directed it most skillfully.

NEW YORK POST
October 28, 1943

"Manhattan Nocturne" a Welcome Surprise at the Forrest

By WILELLA WALDORF

"MANHATTAN NOCTURNE," by Roy Walling, opened at the Forrest Theatre last Tuesday evening when this reviewer was suffering through "Victory Belles" at the Mansfield. Advance reports of the Forrest's new tenant were depressing and we caught yesterday's matinee expecting the worst.

One of the pleasanter aspects of the reviewing business is the fact that now and then the theatre hands you a big surprise. "Manhattan Nocturne" tells a story so familiar that it is possible for any knowing playgoer to keep a jump ahead of the author every step of the way, but it is engrossing theatre fare nevertheless, directed with feeling and intelligence and played so simply, yet effectively, that new interest is stirred in an old, old plot.

Any recapitulation of the story in cold type is sure to sound distressingly sentimental and full of aged cliches about the regeneration of a prostitute. Regarded purely as a Broadway script, "Manhattan Nocturne" is old stuff.

But a nocturne is defined in our dictionary as a dreamy, expressive musical composition, designed to be played at night. Stella Adler, the director, has succeeded to a considerable degree in conveying a mood that fits in with this definition, purely by dramatic means. "Manhattan Nocturne" is not a musical work, but as Miss Adler conducts its players through the basically simple theme, it achieves an emotional appeal comparable to a nocturne in the musical sense.

An Old Story

Except for a number of well realized bit parts, and one excellently played third act character—a police court magistrate—"Manhattan Nocturne" concerns just two people, a once successful novelist on the way down the ladder of success and a "call girl" in a cheap Manhattan hotel.

The novelist is being divorced by a wife who is not interested in failures, and he has dropped into the hotel at the request of her lawyer to play the customary bedroom farce and thus comply with New York's antediluvian divorce laws.

The "call girl" is arranged for at the usual terms, but while they are waiting for the wife and her lawyer to make the routine discovery, before witnesses, they get to talking and discover their mutual disillusionment with life and love.

The first act is steadily interesting. The second suffers somewhat from the fact that it endeavors to spin out the tenuous plot that is obviously developing from the first. But the third act, at the police court, is as good as the first, and is immeasurably helped by Howard Smith's performance as the magistrate.

It is, however, the performances of the two principal characters upon which "Manhattan Nocturne" chiefly depends, and it is lucky to have Eddie Dowling and Terry Holmes to play the parts.

A New Actress

Mr. Dowling is very much at home in such a role—he has played it often enough before—but under Miss Adler's direction he does it rather better than usual.

Miss Holmes, on the other hand, is brand new to Broadway. Her only stage experience before has been in summer theatres and it is heartening to realize that somehow, somewhere, young actresses are being developed in this country despite the meagre opportunities for training and experience outside the Broadway stage itself.

Miss Holmes is not a pretty girl, which is a great relief. Let us all hope it will prove a blessing in that Hollywood may not immediately snap her up. For she shows every evidence of becoming a genuinely fine actress. She is amazingly convincing, and tremendously appealing, as the "call girl" in "Manhattan Nocturne."

This play arrived on Broadway suffering from an inferiority complex. Actually it is a welcome change from the pure, unadulterated junk most of the managers have been serving up ever since the season started.

"Manhattan Nocturne"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 27, 1943

"Manhattan Nocturne"

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MANHATTAN NOCTURNE used to be known as *Driftwood, Flotsam* or *Broken Wings*, but it's still the same story. The one, in short, about the girl who was brutally cast aside by her playboy lover and wound up a call girl in a cheap hotel. There arrives Eddie Dowling, by no means chipper himself, to give his wife grounds for divorce. Afterwards, the two abandoned ones get to talking and they have, to say the least, a right nice effect on each other. In the middle of the night he goes back to his novel writing and she, after reading the fifty pages he dashes off just like that, decides to begin afresh. By morning, it should not surprise you, they have decided to begin afresh together.

But they reckon without the house dick, and off goes the girl to court, coming up before a judge who is not only hard-boiled but a wee bit corrupt. However, Mr. Dowling is not only steadfast, but extremely eloquent, and there are splendid indications, at the end, that the broken wings will heal.

• • •

Like a thousand or more other plays that have sported this plot, *Manhattan Nocturne* is almost bursting with good intentions. But it is not only stale and sentimental and unbearably talky as a story; it is so barnacled with cliches and bad writing that its only fascination lies in your waiting for every piece of old hat that the theme ever gave rise to. The girl, it is true, proves more of a broken thing than the rules absolutely insist upon, being given to fainting fits, buzzings in the ears and considerable amnesia. Nor is her redeemer of mere common clay; playing God has become a sort of specialty with Mr. Dowling, and he plays it at the necessary high altitude. Perhaps sometime he will attempt a role in which there is some other ingredient besides past suffering and present benevolence.

Mr. Dowling goes about his business quietly and sincerely, as always; and Terry Holmes plays the girl with more than ample emotion, suggesting that in a sounder part she might prove something of an actress. Howard Smith does a really good job as the judge.

Now that an erring lamb has been reclaimed, perhaps something can be done about reclaiming an erring season.

'MANHATTAN NOCTURNE'

Play by Roy Walling; staged by Stella Adler; settings designed by Perry Watkins; presented at the Forrest Theater, Tuesday, October 26, 1943, by Walter Drey and George W. Brandt. The cast:

Eddie Talmo	Dehl Berti
Peter Wade	Eddie Dowling
Ann Stevens	Terry Holmes
Grace Wade	Lorraine MacMartin
Monroe Lessing	Donald Keyes
Gimbel	Tom McElhany
Helen	Julann Caffrey
Dolan	Wendell Corey
Mahoney	John Farrell
Judge Petrie	Howard Smith
Carew	Robert Toma

NEW YORK SUN
October 27, 1943

Some Good Acting in a Skimpy Play, 'Manhattan Nocturne,' at the Forrest

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THOSE of us who were blown out of last night's Pago Pago weather into the snug dryness of the Forrest Theater beheld the premiere performance of a tawdry little play called "Manhattan Nocturne" — a skimpy, sketchy, wavering play that has some affecting moments and several good performances.

There are no foot races or standing broad jumps to which our stage has been accustomed in recent evenings. Actors actually stand quite still and talk to one another. It is something of a relief, really. And to this piece Eddie Dowling, a master at under-playing, contributes one of his quietly effective performances.

In "Manhattan Nocturne" Roy Walling writes of the meeting of a frustrated novelist whose marriage has been a failure and who has decided to shoot himself, and a sick and disillusioned girl who is working as a prostitute in a cheap New York hotel. They've both been pushed around a great deal and they give to each other an incentive to live and to make over their lives. When Mr. Walling gets done with them they're starting out afresh, both full of great hope.

"Manhattan Nocturne" is never a play of stature, and the author barely has enough material to spread through his three acts. The best act is the second and the play's best moments those in which the man and the young girl are planning out their future on their $90 bankroll. Here was a scene, well played indeed by Mr. Dowling and Miss Terry Holmes, which a first-night audience followed with rapt attention. Just as audiences used to do when good plays were coming our way.

Mr. Dowling and this young Miss Holmes work well together. It is her first Broadway job and I liked most of her scenes a great deal. She is a young woman of definite talent. Stella Adler's direction has been a help to play and cast. There are excellent characterizations by Dehl Berti as a bellboy, Tom McElhany as a waiter, Wendell Corey as the detective and Howard Smith as the judge.

A shaky and sentimental little melodrama, this "Manhattan Nocturne," and one which the management, that of Walter Drey and George W. Brandt, apparently feels has "audience appeal." You'll like Mr. Dowling and Miss Holmes, too, in some of her scenes.

You may never believe a word of "Manhattan Nocturne" but you'll listen to a lot of it.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 27, 1943

Dowling—That's All

By HOWARD BARNES

EDDIE DOWLING packs such power into a performance that he almost succeeds in making parts of "Manhattan Nocturne" look like the real thing. It is sheer acting sleight of hand. For the new Forrest Theater offering is an extremely shoddy bit of melodramatic romance. Even when the star is filling an unreal role with intensity, plausibility and compassion, the play falls away in a clutter of cliches and nonsense. Dowling keeps one hoping that something human and vital will emerge from the tawdry little plot of "Manhattan Nocturne." The fact is that it is fustian from start to finish, and a sorry background for stalwart acting.

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Roy Walling, who is responsible for this latest dramatic dud of the season, has been avidly concerned with the seamier side of existence. His hero is a dillusioned novelist, who has forgotten how to write. The heroine is a call girl in a shady hotel, who has even forgotten her right name. Some rueful sense might have been made out of their passing in a New York night. Instead, the two deliver the windiest passages of dialogue it has been my misfortune to hear recently and find that they are soul-mates. Since it takes three acts for this phenomenon to occur, it is tough going at the Forrest.

What makes it particularly trying, as I have noted, is the presence of Dowling. He plays with all the brooding detachment that made his acting in "The Time of Your Life" so memorable. This time he has no William Saroyan to back him up. He quickens the sluggish pulse of the melodrama on more than one occasion. He even gives it a shot of effective violence. For all his ministrations "Manhattan Nocturne" remains an inert and inept bit of balderdash.

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The star's chief support comes from Terry Holmes, who plays the prostitute with uneven, but promising make-believe. There are one or two brief interludes, when she is appearing opposite Dowling, that she almost makes the character believeable, in spite of the script. The other players take routine assignments in their stride, generally making the play look better than it is. Stella Adler's staging is also better than the play deserved. A lot of talent has been wasted on "Manhattan Nocturne".

NEW YORK TIMES
October 27, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Manhattan Nocturne"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"MANHATTAN NOCTURNE," which came accompanied by storm to the Forrest last evening, sounds not a little like a long composition turned in for English 12, a course open to Juniors. It is full of nobility, prostitution and regeneration, as though in thinking it up Roy Walling had been unable to decide whether to follow William Saroyan or the Ben Hecht of Chicago days. The chief and unfortunate result is that as a play it is pretty much on the confused side, even during those moments when it is not downright tedious. The state of the theatre remains this morning about where it was, a state, the reports say, which is somewhat unbelievable.

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Eddie Dowling, who is a gentle mild-mannered actor, has the leading role in "Manhattan Nocturne." His is the part of a novelist who has seen better days, who is in a hotel to give his wife evidence upon which to divorce him. His partner is a young prostitute with a case of amnesia brought about by her lover's having left her in Mount Vernon in order to marry someone else. Being what it is as a contribution to the drama, the play then tells of the couple's planning to go away together, to start life over, of the girl's arrest on a charge of prostitution and of her release through the novelist's intercession before the magistrate. The girl hears the voice of her old lover telling her what to do; the novelist hears the voices of his friends telling him what to write. It is all a little psychic.

Mr. Dowling can do nothing much with all this save try not to appear too ridiculous, which he does by playing it formally, with a calm attitude suggesting that while it may not be much, there it is. To Terry Holmes falls the trying part of the girl, who must faint, cry, curse, shiver and drift into forgetfulness in about as many seconds as it takes to write it down, and must furthermore be a tough lady of the evening and a starry-eyed ingenue about to set forth for life anew somewhere on a farm up North. Probably no one could do it. The one good bit part offered by the play is that of the magistrate of the third act, and Howard Smith takes advantage of that. Stella Adler in her direction has tried to disguise the fact there is not much action there, but not always has she succeeded. The tawdry hotel room and magistrate's chambers are by Perry Watkins.

"Manhattan Nocturne"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 27, 1943

Dowling Good in Slender Story

By ALTON COOK

EDDIE DOWLING would have been a friendless man today if he had put a bad play before all the faithful who battled last night's elements to crowd into the Forrest Theater for the opening of Manhattan Nocturne. They saw no great shucks of a play but it was enough to keep them in a mildly warm glow as they sat in out of the rain. When the weather lifts, quite a few people will want to get around to the Forrest for the same experience.

Mr. Dowling is neither producer nor author of Manhattan Nocturne, but he is responsible for most of the good spirit the audience took away with it. A wise and understanding characterization spreads an atmosphere of substance and reality over a slender little story that at times becomes earnest and stirring, but keeps wavering into moments of the lurid, distraught and tawdry.

The man of this play comes to a call house, undecided whether to blow his brains out or to provide evidence for the divorce his wife demands. The divorce idea prevails and his wife steps in for the formalities required of her becoming a witness. She cannot resist a sceneful of scathing remarks for one final humiliation of her husband before she leaves.

Bruised Lives Mend

Even the girl's harsh front is penetrated by that display, enough to get them talking together. A fainting spell and obvious symptoms that she is mad stir a renewal of his self-reliance, springing from the idea of someone dependent on him, a strength that had been sapped by his grasping jade of a wife. He sits down to write, confident for the first time in years that he can regain his place as a successful novelist.

The future of the pair is worked out in police court, where the panders, unwilling to lose their luscious little merchandise, drag the girl with the idea of a jail sentence until this romance blows over. Then we find the girl had been driven to prostitution by an obsession, a frenzy of insane grief over a lover who had deserted her. The man of broken spirit and the girl of broken mind finally are sent out to heal their bruised lives together.

As Roy Walling narrates it in Manhattan Nocturne, there is only a slight wisp of play material here—even at its leisurely pace it runs well under two hours. No compromise adds dispensable dialogue, though, to keep the play running to the usual hour.

Dowling Bolsters Play

The play runs thin, but, as we mentioned before, that is where Eddie Dowling comes in. Nothing short of his quietly convincing integrity could have made it seem important whether that novelist used his pistol on himself or went away with his little waif to write more great novels. The virtuoso displays of alternating delirious excitement and sweetness in the girl's role were a hard task to give a miss making a Broadway debut, but a pretty little summer theater graduate named Terry Holmes acquitted herself well. She will acquit herself still better if the play runs long enough to allow her to learn some slight moderations in her fits of violent trembling.

Between this pair and the direction of Stella Adler a well- turned performance is achieved. The supporting roles are incidental, but they are well played. Special applause went to Howard Smith for a judge who was essentially honest but caught in a system. Debi Berti with the cheap swank of a junior Lucky Luciano, Lorraine MacMartin as a vividly loathsome ingrate and the blandly corrupt detective played by Wendell Corey are other bright spots.

If you gather from this review that you must be fond of Eddie Dowling to get full value from this play—you have the idea. For us people, it's a pretty fair evening, however.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 27, 1943

New Dowling Show At Forrest Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

THE NEWS, the good news, the very good news from the theatrical front is that an exceedingly gifted young actress has made her debut at the Forrest Theatre. This exceedingly gifted young actress is Terry Holmes. Miss Holmes, taking her initial curtain calls on Broadway, is to be seen and heard opposite Eddie Dowling in "Manhattan Nocturne," the new piece by Roy Walling. Not since Lillian Foster turned the town upside down in "Conscience" has our island sat before so outstanding a newcomer.

Miss Holmes is that rare phenomenon, a born and bred New Yorker. She learned about acting—and with power, precision and an utterly disarming integrity—at the Sayville, L. I., Playhouse. During two seasons there she started with small parts and graduated to ingenue roles in such run-of-the-suburbs successes as "The Philadelphia Story," "Mr. and Mrs. North," "The Pursuit of Happiness" and "The Male Animal."

How these comparatively simple roles—any role Katherine Hepburn can get away with is a comparatively simple role and Katherine Hepburn did get away with "The Philadelphia Story"—led Terry Holmes to the amazingly effective performance she gives, along with Eddie Dowling at the Forrest, I wouldn't pretend to know. But, in "Manhattan Nocturne," she never for a moment lets Mr. Dowling down. And, long before he got mixed up with William Saroyan and George Jean Nathan, Mr. D. was almost anybody's favorite underactor.

He still is! And, I imagine, he always will be. Last night it was heartening to see him playing into the hands of Terry Holmes. An established mummer who can sing, dance and act circles around the best of them, he is, first and last a showman. He knew, as well as did, what his leading lady was making theatrical history. And, like the true theatrician he is, he gave her the best of everything. He made last night her night, and I love him for it.

Last night was Terry Holmes' night because Eddie Dowling was definitely on her side as the Peter Wade who is the unheroic hero of "Manhattan Nocturne." A curious, two-sided play—it is really a duel between the Peter Wade who is Mr. Dowling and the Ann Stevens who is Terry Holmes—Miss Holmes needs Mr. Dowling just as much as Mr. Dowling needs Miss Holmes. One complements the other.

And, hard-boiled theatrician that I try to be, it is wonderful to see Miss Holmes and Mr. Dowling acting their hearts out together. "Manhattan Nocturne" has no sub-plot, no fictional side issue, to help the yarn along. From first to last it the simple narrative—written more like a novel than a play— of an unhappily married novelist and a call-girl in a mid-Manhattan hotel. She, until she meets up with Mr. Dowling, is none too happy either.

As you can guess, it's a trite and tried story playwright Roy Walling has to tell. Not only is it trite and tried, but the outcome is obvious from the start. Nowadays, at the Forrest —which, by the way, is looking more than a wee bit shabby, as if "Tobacco Road" had been having its revenge—there is practically no suspense. Only the suspense created by Miss Holmes' and Mr. Dowling's acting. It is exciting to see them work histrionically together.

In the supporting cast are Wendell Corey, who is a direct descendent of John Quincy Adams, if that means a whole lot to you; Howard Smith, who was a friend of Enrico Caruso and no fooling; Lorraine MacMartin, who went to private schools in Massachusetts and Bermuda, and Donald Keyes, who is a Harvard man. At Harvard, he only "dabbled" at theatricals.

Frankly, I found "Manhattan Nocturne" refreshingly original and delightfully different from the average Broadway what-have-you. I'd call it a novelette rather than a play, a one-track, two-character story that begins at the beginning, continues through the middle and stops when it gets to the end. In it are Eddie Dowling, who performs with his customary character and skill, and Terry Holmes, who is a newcomer to make a professional first-nighter stand up and cheer. That girl's got what it takes to make an actress.

"Slightly Married"

NEW YORK SUN
October 26, 1943

'Slightly Married,' Scream and Scurry Farce, Has Premiere at the Cort

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE time was last night, the place was the Cort, the subject was pregnancy—and the play was on the sorry side. Such is today's report on "Slightly Married," which traveled some 3,200 miles to bring farcical violence and some very bad acting into Forty-eighth street.

The news has got around that you can light up a marquee in New York these days, paint the houseboards, raise the curtain on just anything at all, and get a paying public. This news certainly spread to San Francisco, where the Cort farce was having a run under the title of "Mother's Day." So several estimable gentlemen, two of whom I've known for many years, decided to ship their little play eastward and try their luck. I feel that they're going to need it, and a lot of it.

If you want to compare "Slightly Married" with other obstetrical pieces of comparatively recent date, let's say that it's a shade better than the lamented "Snark Was a Boojum" but not within miles of being as good as such a farce as "3 Is a Family." It's all about the 17-year-old daughter o fthe Quins of Erie, Pa., who discovered she was going to have a baby. Seems that she and her young soldier friend, same age, got a marriage license, and they really thought they were married, but a ceremony was never performed. For the sake of appearances mother steps in and assumes pregnancy, the baby is born, and the play is over.

"Slightly Married" is scream and scurry drama all the way. Everybody shouts all the time. The traffic in the Quins's living room is considerable. The acting is energetic, and that's all. Several of the evening's performers are woefully amateurish.

Leon Ames, a competent actor when he has a script, is the head of the household and Leona Maricle plays his wife. Miss Maricle is certainly to be remembered for that arch and zestful performance she gave as the receptionist in "Once in a Lifetime." She and Mr. Ames would team up well together in a play worth their time. On the basis of last night's performance I can't say that young Jimmie Smith, who has the character of Keith Morehouse, the juvenile father, is on his way to being an Edwin Booth.

"Slightly Married" treats of the servant problem as a secondary theme. But pregnancy is it's topic and they don't keep you waiting long before they tell you so. Any teen-age actress who happens upon a New York stage these days and who is not in the role of an expectant mother is indeed a novelty.

It's been tough going this season for the theater called the Cort. I can't see much of a chance for "Slightly Married."

"Slightly Married"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 26, 1943

The Stork's a Very Dull Bird

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ONCE MORE, in this most obstetrical of seasons, childbearing is in the saddle. But judging by *Slightly Married*, playwriting is in the cradle, if it can even be said to be born. It would take considerable ingenuity to concoct anything duller or more witless in the way of farce; and even if a sorrier script turned up I doubt whether it could be given a production to vie in horror with last night's. But this is definitely not meant as a challenge to wayward playwrights and producers; it is only a warning to playgoers.

This little number which, for some reason, was rushed here from California, deals with a pair of worldly 17-year-olds who thought getting a marriage license constituted getting married. Hence, when the stork loomed they were technically not in a position to welcome it; and by that time, as a matter of fact, they found they didn't want to be married anyway. It seemed easier, and of course more hilarious, for the girl to go on a visit to grandma and the girl's mother to pretend that *she* was going to have a baby and also go visit grandma when the time came. You can bet that the time comes, and quite a time it is.

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Slightly Married also has a fully developed secondary theme, which is the servant problem. Carloads of applicants, naturally; but I'm afraid not even one new gag.

Indeed, the dialogue is a caution throughout. And though I heartily sympathize with those who had to speak it, I wonder whether any other set of actors could have made it sound quite as bad. Or would have winded themselves quite as much running in and out of doors and up those stairs without which no bad farce seems able to exist.

I fancy the director also had some slight part in the general disaster.

'SLIGHTLY MARRIED'

Farce by Aleen Leslie; staged by Melville Burke; setting designed by Phil Raiguel; presented by Mr. Burke at the Cort Theater Monday evening, October 25, 1943. The cast:

Brian Quin	Leon Ames
Stanley Quin	Scotty Beckett
Audrey Quin	Leona Maricle
Margaret Quin	Patty Pope
Terry Jamison	Tom Seidel
Josie Dowling	Mona Barrie
Keith Morehouse	Jimmie Smith
Lisa Ward	Kathryn Keys
Grandma Jamison	Isabel O'Madigan
Bella	Teddi Sherman
Hortense	Kate Harrington
Ambulance Driver	Bert Horton

NEW YORK POST
October 26, 1943

"Slightly Married" a West Coast "Kiss and Tell"

By WILELLA WALDORF

"SLIGHTLY MARRIED," the farce presented last night at the Cort Theatre, comes to us from California, and most of its actors give the impression that they ran most of the way. Nearly everybody is pretty well winded by the time Act III goes on, and Mona Barrie was probably very grateful to be carried from the stage on a stretcher just before the final curtain fell. The others were not so lucky. They leaned against the furniture and panted.

Here apparently is the West Coast "Kiss and Tell," with overtones of "Three's a Family," and anybody who is sick of pregnant women on the stage will be sicker still after this one. Margaret, the 17-year-old daughter of the Quin household, starts prattling about her "condition" almost as soon as the curtain rises, and the conversation takes a distinctly obstetrical turn from that time on.

Aleen Leslie, who wrote the play, is also interested in the servant problem. The lengths to which housewives will go to snare, and keep, a maid are heavily underscored.

Miss Leslie manages to stir up a number of laughs in her first act, even if most of her characters do seem very familiar to those of us who get around to the other Broadway theatres, but she begins to run out of material in Act II and recklessly tosses in all sorts of odds and ends in the hope that audiences will still roar. They do.

When Act III comes along, the author is pretty frantic for gags, and as the play grew weaker and weaker, the director, Melville Burke, was probably in the wings yelling "Faster, faster!" to the cast.

By this time the baby is being prematurely born upstairs, with only an interne and a medical book in attendance, and since there really isn't much of a script left, Mr. Burke whips up a terrific barrage of spurious excitement by sending the actors, one after another, careening downstairs, sliding on rugs to the telephone, shouting into the transmitter, and tearing back upstairs again.

If "Slightly Married" has a Broadway run—no doubt it will—everybody in the company is going to wind up underweight. Mr. Burke himself must be a wreck.

Among the sprinters last night were Leon Ames, Leona Maricle—who has been away for some time—Scotty Beckett, Tom Seidel, and the above mentioned Miss Barrie. Young Mr. Beckett is the boyish son of the house who knows more about the facts of life than anybody on the stage. Jimmie Smith plays an innocent young soldier and the Junior Miss of the family is Patty Pope with a perpetually screwed up face, she being the pregnant one and very unhappy about it. Miss Pope is an attractive girl but if she goes on scowling like that, she'll get wrinkles.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 26, 1943

More About Babies

By HOWARD BARNES

FRESH from San Francisco has come another farce about begetting in war time. The notion is even less funny in "Slightly Married" than it has been in the theater's previous obstetrical lampoons. Since it is coupled at the Cort with some dull jesting about the present-day servant problem, it makes for something less than a gay entertainment. There are several moderately amusing moments in this Aleen Leslie play. There are one or two engaging performances. By and large it is more frantic and biologically boisterous than it is funny.

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It is no novelty, of course, to see actresses strapping on pillows and climbing into maternity dresses these days. For a time it seemed that there was a conspiracy on the part of our playwrights to make childbirth the funniest thing to observe since the old lady slipped on a banana peel. The author of "Slightly Married" labors the point in no uncertain fashion. Not content to have an adolescent become pregnant without benefit of clergy, she has her mother pretend that she is going to have the baby. There are lots of quips about morning sickness and other gynecological symptoms. They lead to little honest humor.

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As a matter of fact, the footnotes to the current shortage in domestic help, while far from inspired, are far merrier than the pregnancy gags in "Slightly Married." The scene in which a nice girl, who is being wooed by the bachelor brother in an Erie, Pa., household, is mistaken for a maid applying for a job, is rather deft and daffy. On the other hand, an extraneous interlude which finds the head of the house making love to a moronic maid of all work in order to keep her on the job, is as tasteless as it is dull. Perhaps I should take it back. None of the farcical material in "Slightly Married" is calculated to make you laugh much or often.

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Of the players, Leon Ames, as the harassed father, and Scotty Beckett, as a brash youngster who views the predicament of his sister with understanding and a certain scorn, are alone in sustaining comic characteristics. Leona Maricle, as the sacrificial mother who tries to cover up for her errant daughter, is stumped by the assignment; Patty Pope, as the kid who thinks she has married a soldier by applying for a marriage license, merely sits around and gets bigger through three acts and Mona Barrie and the others race around a lot without generating much in the way of rowdy burlesque. Melville Burke, producer and director of "Slightly Married," has staged it briskly. One only wonders why he ever picked it.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 26, 1943

'Slightly Married' Is One More Feeble Farce About Pregnancy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

DON'T let the weather fool you. Those red leaves on the dogwood, that extra blanket on your bed and last night's windy rain don't mean that Winter comes. It's still summer or early Fall—before Labor Day, if you want to make a dirty gag about it—and we're still about to have babies. We had another one last night at the Cort Theatre in a play called "Slightly Married."

In this one a 17-year-old girl becomes anticipant through affection for a 17-year-old soldier. Because the young couple are so dumb they only think they're married (they got a license, waited the lawful three days and then went to a tourist cabin), the 40-year-old mother of the wench decides that she will take the rap and pretend that she is having the baby. In the third act she even wears a pillow and a Lane Bryant model.

Pleasant Actors Present

This is the family comedy which, having rocked San Francisco only a little less than the happy prank of 1906, was rushed right here out of the fog that flows in through the Golden Gate. Some members of last night's audience laughed fit to bust but I didn't. I kept thinking that here were several pleasant and able actors for whom somebody should write something funny.

There was Leon Ames, good type for the average harassed husband of Erie, Pa. There was Leona Maricle, of attractive bearing and humor, playing the mother who tries to have her daughter's baby. There was Mona Barrie, wasting a talent for fluttery farce on the role of a friend of the family.

Three Good Youngsters

Also present were Scotty Beckett, a film veteran at the age of 14, playing the usual wisecracking kid brother with assurance; Jimmie Smith, a Hollywood High School senior, doing the under-age soldier with a funny face and a funny voice; and Patty Pope, of Laguna Beach, Calif., who spent most of the evening moaning, "I'm so pregnant!" These three youngsters should be put in George Abbott's card index system for the next time George has a good comedy of youth.

The author of "Slightly Married," Aleen Leslie, has a sub-plot in her play about how hard it is to get or keep a maid these days. I forget what happened in this part, but probably it wasn't much. Anyhow, it's still hard to get or keep a maid.